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SPE 465: Capstone
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Critical Analysis of Portfolio

Throughout my experience as an undergraduate student a common thread has consistently appeared in my work and throughout my portfolio -- positive approaches in special education. Within my work a pattern of advocacy for all students to receive equal access to the curriculum, to learn in an environment that is free of prejudices, and to address behavior problems using positive support strategies has become clear. As an educator, I believe in using positive, preventative behavior approaches in the classroom. In preparing to become a teacher of students with moderate disabilities from pre-k to grade eight, I have completed case studies, such as self study one and the assessment case study on students in my practicum settings, and reflected on myself as both a teacher and learner in practicum seminar and in self study two; I have written an education philosophy that governs my teaching; and I have designed a behavior intervention plan that optimizes learning for a child while taking a behavior management; and designed a curriculum for students in my third grade practicum classroom for a curriculum course. These assignments are all evidence of my growth into a special educator.

Based on a research paper I prepared for my Capstone course, I studied that as a profession, Special Education is influenced by ever-changing laws and mandates from the Federal and State governments. For example, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or I.D.E.A. mandates that children are placed in the least restrictive environment. This law directly connects to the theme of positive approaches for equal access to the curriculum because it allows students with special needs to receive supports,

accommodations, and modifications so that they can learn in a positive school setting that fits the needs of their disability. Current behavioral approaches in special education like – Positive Behavior Support Systems –directly relate to the theme of my work. I strongly believe in this approach and have fashioned behavior intervention plans and classroom models after it. By setting clear and positive expectations for classroom behavior, a student can clearly understand what is expected. Instead of setting clear expectations about what not to do, this offers little suggestion to the student about how to behave. It is also important and necessary to model appropriate behaviors that offer students with behavior disabilities the opportunity to follow the model and the suggested positive behaviors. This gives the student an opportunity to learn from example and eventually internalize and therefore, adopt the appropriate behaviors and positive strategies independently.

My theme of positive approaches and equality is directly connected to the theory of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (Gay, 2000) and growth mindset (Dweck, 2006) that governs my personal philosophy of education. Both theories are deeply rooted in allowing children to feel comfortable in their learning environment without feeling prejudices based on their race, gender, socio-economic statuses, etc; and using students prior knowledge, cultural experiences, and interests to teach to their strengths; and ask for student praise that highlights the importance of hard work and perseverance. When completing self study one, I worked one on one with a third grade student, Kyle, to reach the following goals: aligning his writing with the rubric objectives, limiting the behavior of calling out with answers and extra information during whole class instruction. In order to achieve these goals, I worked with Kyle using both theories of Culturally Responsive

Pedagogy and growth mindset. All of my interactions with Kyle were based within the following key idea: I will use my knowledge of Kyle's strengths and interests to offer explicit directions and praise his effort towards reaching his goals. This key idea is an example of how I took theory and integrated it directly into my classroom dialogue and instruction.

As I begin my career as a Special Educator the theme of positive approaches will be evident in my lesson plans, curriculum designs, and most significantly in my behavior management techniques. By looking for a deeper connection in my portfolio work I have discovered my passion for encouraging students through behavior approaches that focus on the positive, praise for academic work that focuses on the hard work and effort put in by the student rather than the grade given, and allowing a positive attitude and environment to welcome all students into my classroom. An example of this positive approach can be found in my assessment case study. When working with my focal student I based my praise on the positive aspects of his efforts and outcomes and did not focus on the negative or incorrect responses/behaviors. I also worked to create an environment that used positive preventative approaches to institute a behavior change model. The behavior intervention plan that I created, while taking the behavior management course, is made up of entirely positive and mostly preventative approaches against a specific target behavior for a students with bi-polar disorder coupled with a learning disability. I worked with Mike to reach the following goal: Mike will follow adult request/ instruction and utilize adult supports and redirection (ie. verbal/non verbal cues) during times of noncompliance. In order to reach this goal, I integrated into the behavior change plan the following: preventative measures (like creating a to-do list for

various periods of the school day to offer a clear list of positive expectations for Mike to follow and eliminating the need for a teacher to verbalize the directions), replacement behaviors and skills (beginning with a teacher modeling of the to-do list and working towards a self management program), and developed teacher responses and a plan when a problem behavior occurs.

As I prepare to graduate, the need for me to seek and continue professional development is vital to support the consistent learning and growing that educators must constantly do. As the theme of my portfolio suggests, I will seek out opportunities to learn about models of positive behavior support on both the classroom and also the school wide level. Attending workshops for special educators that encourage equality in the classroom and offer advice on how to teach using culturally responsive pedagogy is very important to me. I am making choices in my career to work in Southern Massachusetts and am looking for jobs in the elementary setting. While this population of students will of course be different then the Boston community that I have experienced in my Wheelock practica, I will need to re-adjust and turn to more community specific training to acclimate myself to the diversity of students in my class. No matter where I am working, I will create and foster a classroom culture that stays true to my philosophy of education. As a teacher I must learn from my students about their individual personalities, cultures, identities, and educational needs. I will use culturally responsive teaching to create a comfortable environment where all my students are part of a supportive community of learners regardless of the racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, gender, or socioeconomic differences between classmates, and between the students and their teacher. In my classroom I will work to create a learning environment where lessons

and curriculum are built around accommodations and/or modifications that meet each individual student's learning needs. By continuing professional development in the area of positive behavioral supports and culturally responsive pedagogy I will further my understanding and continue to create, develop, and revamp the learning environment I described above.

References

Dweck, C.(2006). *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. New York: Random House

Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, & Practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.